

Comments on "Japanese Negotiating Behavior:  
Psychological and Psychoanalytic Dimensions"  
Paper presented by Prof. Peter Berton

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# Comments on “Japanese Negotiating Behaviour: Psychological and Psychoanalytic Dimensions”

— Paper presented by Prof. Peter Berton

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My comments on the paper shall be divided into two parts. The first part concerns the *amae* psychology itself, and the second part shall be comments on Prof. Berton's argument that this psychology affects the negotiating behaviour of the Japanese.

Allow me to talk first on *amae* at some length.

Prof. Doi admits that the desire to depend may be a universal sentiment. However, he assumes that the Japanese are particularly familiar with the emotion the word *amae* represents, because of his belief that there is no corresponding word to *amae* in Western languages.

In Spanish there is no corresponding verb to *amaeru* (in a typical case, a baby *amaeru* towards his mother), and only exists “mimar” which corresponds to *amayakasu* (for example, a mother *amayakasu* her baby = to spoil). However, “mimar” appears to me to possess a more acceptable or even agreeable connotation than “to spoil” in English. As to adjectives, there exist not only “mimado,” equivalent of “spoiled,” but also “mimoso” which may be translated as loving or likable.

In Indonesian there is “manja” which is used in the same way as *amaeru*. “Manja” is the root word, while “memanjakan” which can be translated as “to spoil” is a derivative. This is exactly same as in Japanese.

This is no more than my very wild guess, but I suspect that among Asian languages there may be some others which possess words equivalent of *amaeru*. A comparative study to corroborate this fact and to compare the connotations which the equivalent words of *amaeru* in distinct languages carry with them may be interesting philologically and sociologically.

The second point I would like to mention in connection with the *amae* psychology is that the very existence of the word may be a reflection of the Japanese culture in which interpersonal relations are given utmost importance. Prof. Doi mentions in the foreword of the tenth year's Japanese edition of his famed book “The anatomy of dependence” that he felt that Japanese people might take just pride in possessing the *amae* sensitivity. Furthermore, in his book he admits that *amae* is not just a one-way sentiment from below to above quoting as an example the case of the emperor. If *amae* or dependence works both ways, it comes to constitute an interdependence, which is given high value in any society.

One can depend only when there is readiness on the part of the partner to be depended

upon. *Amae* can only prevail when there is a subtle understanding of each other's delicate sentiment. If considered in such a context the *amae* sentiment comes to form part of the Japanese cultural tradition of trying to be considerate of neighbour's sentiment. What we can justly take pride of is perhaps this culture of caring to be considerate of others (culture of *omoiyari*), rather than the *amae* sentiment itself.

Prof. Eshun Hamaguchi, a professor at this international Center for Japanese Studies, tries to explain the predominance of interpersonal relationship in the Japanese social system by introducing the concept of the contextual — a human existence conceived in the context of the relations with others —, as against the Western concept of the individual as a form of human existence. In the contextualistic society "people feel they should seek to help one another because mutual dependence is a natural human condition."

It appears to me that this culture of *omoiyari* based on the contextualistic human existence, as a broad concept which encompasses even the *amae* type sentiment, describes better the salient trait of the Japanese people's psychology, rather than the *amae* psychology which comes to surface only in specific human relations — most typically between a child and a mother.

I would like to contend, going even further, that one way in which Japan may be able to contribute to the international community might be through this culture of *omoiyari*. I shall dwell on this point, however, not at this juncture but later at the very end of my comments.

I shall now proceed to the second part of my comments and discuss Prof. Berton's argument that the *amae* psychology is an important determinant in the Japanese negotiating behaviour.

First, I would like to make two comments of general nature.

The first of these is that a great number of complex factors are involved in the formation of the negotiating attitude of a delegation in an international negotiation. The national interests vary by different issues. As Prof. Zartman rightly points out in his book, a great power not always enjoys a superior negotiating strength. A small nation strongly committed to a cause may be stronger in a negotiation involving the cause than a great power not so committed. So, the degree of commitment is a factor. Public opinion is an important determinant. It is not so easy a process to filter out all these extraneous elements and to extract the national trait as a determinant in the negotiating behaviour of a delegation. I feel that for this attempt to be successful it requires a great deal of patient studies with rigorous academic discipline.

I suspect that meaningful results of this attempt may be obtained only through a systematic accumulation of numerous well-planned case studies. It would be not only meaningless but confusing to try to come to a hasty conclusion, generalizing remarks or quotations gathered haphazardly.

The second of the comments of general nature is that the very nature of a diplomatic negotiation makes rather difficult the above referred extracting process. In order to find a positive sum solution to an issue, diplomats try to find a common ground, speaking a common

language with the other party in the negotiation. Prof. Zartman mentions in his book; “— by now the world has established an international diplomatic culture that soon socializes its members into similar behavior. Even the Chinese have learned to play the U. N. game by its rules, —.” Based on my own experience, I would like unreservedly to endorse this view. It is usual that diplomatic negotiators make every effort to adhere to the rules of the international diplomatic culture trying to avoid peculiar cultural influences on the negotiation.

However, there are factors which constrain diplomatic negotiators in their efforts to internationalize their negotiating attitude. Any nation has influential groups or lobbies which try to affect the course of diplomatic negotiations. Negotiations with those domestic groups are often more important than the external negotiations. Prof. Zartman again very rightly points out the importance of the “vertical” negotiation.

If the two veteran Japanese diplomats, Mr. Kitamura and Mr. Ogura, have made references in the past to the *amae* psychology, as quoted by Prof. Berton, it means that they felt that this psychology acted as a constraint in formulating a reasonable negotiating position. It should by no means be interpreted that they themselves negotiated with *amae* psychology. Furthermore, I suspect that the whole episode is becoming outdated, forty-three years after the end of the American occupation. I have checked with some of the senior diplomats engaged in the recent economic negotiations with the United States. They told me that they had never felt that the Japanese people entertained the *amae* sentiment towards the Americans.

Of course, the national characteristics are multifacetic and there may exist such features as to act as negative elements for skillful negotiations. However, it would be inappropriate to focuss solely on such negative features and come to the hasty conclusion that a particular nation has lesser capacity to be skillful negotiators. I could quote many writings by Americans on the isolationist trend or self-righteous attitude of the American people. But I could not become bold enough to conclude, based on these quotations, that the Americans are poor negotiators.

As one who argues for the importance of case studies, I feel that I should contribute to the debate by introducing my own experiences in negotiating with the Americans. Because of the time constraint, I shall summarily talk of two or three negotiations in which I was directly involved.

In the latter half of 1960's I was a director in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in charge of first the political and later the economic relations with the United States. The sense of injury or the feeling of being victimized was not always entertained by the Japanese side. Such feeling changed sides depending on issues. As to the aviation and the fisheries, the Japanese side had the feeling of being victimized because of the unequitable treaties imposed upon them in the occupation period. As to the automobiles and the textile trade, it was the American side who had the sense of injury. Throughout these negotiations I have no memory of encountering any feeling of *amae*.

Around the last years of 1960's the liberalization of the Japanese market for trade and

investment was picking up its momentum, and the prevailing mood in the government was that Japan should discharge its responsibilities in the international community commensurate with its growing economic power, quite contrary to the *amae* like sentiment.

I felt very much encouraged by the importance given by Prof. Zartman to the process of prenegotiation. The task given to me in the years between 1964 and 67 was how to bring the Okinawa and Bonin Islands issue to a negotiating table. To achieve this objective, the Japanese side resorted to the tactic of intentionally adopting a series of measures to remind the Americans of the fact that the Okinawan inhabitants are legally Japanese nationals. Through this tactic the Japanese side tried to let the Americans feel in their skin that the American administration of Okinawa was in fact an administration imposed upon foreign people, and not in harmony with American ideals and traditions.

This example of the prenegotiation for the return of the administration of Okinawa appears on the surface to have some connection with the *amae* psychology, because in this case the Japanese side expected a concession from the American side relying on the high moral standard and fairness of the American people. But it was a calculated move and not driven by an emotion like *amae*.

Lastly, allow me to present my yet immature idea that the Japanese national trait, which appears to be treated as a rather negative element both in Prof. Berton's paper and in Prof. Friedheim's, can be a positive element for the future of the international community.

I entertain an idea that the Japanese way of life, as aptly described by Prof. Hamaguchi, in which the interpersonal relationship is given an intrinsic value and the consideration of others' sentiment is a primordial concern, may be able to claim a universal application. In the current international society with ever increased interdependence among nations with different cultural and historic backgrounds, tolerance and harmony may be regarded as values as important as justice and equality.

In this context, I would like to conclude my comments by quoting, with some modification, from a brief essay on the expected Japanese role in the international society by a well-known Thai journalist, which I have recently read with a good degree of sympathy.

"Japan with her brand of traditional Asian subtle quality and newly developed forthright style, will be able to stand side by side with all superpowers and be counted as *a strong leader with a gentle and caring heart*. None of the superpowers today has that rare quality." (Japan that can say "we care", by Suthichai Yoon, publisher and editor of the Thai daily "Nation")

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